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Wild Flowers of Fancy

LEMUEL AUGUSTUS SMITH

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WILD FLOWERS OF FANCY

A BROCHURE

BY

LEMUEL AUGUSTUS SMITH

Author of "Miss Tabitha Jones," "The Generous Guest," etc., etc.

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Foreword.

In most men, Fancy is a prominent attribute, and to some men it is a source of infinite pleasure to allure from the mind its phantasms of beauty or impossible dreams of glittering ideality. In a great many instances it stops there; a few men turn their fancy to fact, and the world calls it genius.

In this modest little volume I have humbly placed a few of the phantasms which imagination created within my day-dreams. A few wild flowers plucked by Fancy from the pied fields of Reverie and gathered into a garland about which is entwined a thread of Hope that its palpable imperfections will not be too severely condemned, and if in them there is any sweet suggestion or fragrance of sentiment that some one may enjoy these little flowers of the Fancy.

They are wild flowers because they grew spontaneously, with no culture beyond that of tender endeavor. Although I might aspire to the wonderful and exquisite exotics of the genius of

the craft, I realize that some things are impossible, and herbs or plants must grow according to the fertility of the soil in which they have their roots.

So be it. These little verses give me joy and those I love. They fill a place, although small, and hence I trust their existence be not vain.

If kind fortune so wills it that their sphere be larger than I dare hope, may it be they will not suffer by extension of their horizon.

"MY GLASS IS SMALL BUT I DRINK FROM MY GLASS."

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Wild Flowers of Fancy.

Wild Flowers of Fancy.

'TIS not a garniture of exotics I bind,
A chaplet of posies rare,—
'Tis only the wild flowers I find
In dells where they sweetly flare.
A wreath of fanciful blooms
That burst spontaneous to form,
And enlighten a heartless gloom,
Or sooth a soul's alarm.
A bouquet of my sweets, you see?
Mayhap, they suit not the critical Bee!

Divine Philanthropy.

Divine Philanthropy.

A SONNET.

AFAR where the sunset glows
Against the purpling sky,
My truant fancy wand'ring goes,
And my dreams in colors vie
With its hues. What no man knows
My human ken doth try
To solve. My wingèd thoughts on high
Seem to fly whither the wild wind blows.

But 'tis vain in a mortal mind
To float so on Fancy's wing;
To delve in problems of divine
Contrivance. Such thoughts only bring
The truth of human humility—
The altruism of futility.

The Soul of the Rose.

The Soul of the Rose.

PRITHEE, tell me, crimson rose,
The secret of sweetness so rare:
A hint thy petals disclose,
Like a seraph whispering there.

Wherefore thy blush, oh, timid plant,
So modest o'er soul so sweet?
Fain would I sing a fairy's chant
To mate with fragrance so meet!

Effulgence of odor divine,
Perfumed pulses on quiv'ring air,
Whisper thy source to these ears of mine,
And let me thy trembling secret share.

Faint, elusive, and perfect charm,
Symbol of sighs and lover's tongue,
Dost thou startle at the bee's alarm
As he nestles thy delicate folds among?

Is thy scarlet a blush of bliss,
  Thy rhythmic tremors a modest sign
To taste the touch of ardent kiss,
  As thou and the bee intertwine?

Whence'er thy sweetness springs,
  In its rare and winsome way,
'Tis sweeter, rarer than earthly things,
  With its delicate, subtle sway.

Fraternity.

Fraternity.

A BROTHER'S heart with a brother's hand
Is the noblest right of man—
A mutual end with common might
Wins the crisis of the fight.

Mississippi.

Mississippi.

I LOVE thy flower-spangled sod,
A paradise given by thy God,
Where the jasmines sway and nod,
Mississippi.

I love the sun of thy indolent day,
The land of the lilies' spray,
The sweet place of the month of May,
Mississippi.

I love thy carolling mocking-bird,
Sweetest warbler ever heard,
Infinite music without a word,
Mississippi.

Louise.

Louise.

LOUISE, Louise, my own heart's ease,
With smile so radiant and rare;
Louise, Louise, I bend my knees
To kneel to face so fair.

Sweetheart, love, like stars above,
The lights of your eyes glisten and gleam.
Louise, dear dove, I quicken to love,
When I win even one stray beam.

Brown eyes, brown eyes, twin frowns for lies,
My lips must fain speak true,
And whisper a volume of sighs
When my tongue dares speak to you.

Good-bye, good-bye, and if I die,
With the last gasp of my breath,
To you near-by I'll tenderly cry,
And love you e'en in death!

A Mother's Love.

A Mother's Love.

A SWEETHEART loves in a passionate way,
And time can cool what passion fired;
And the throb of love is gone in a day,
Fleeting as the dreams it inspired.

A friend may love in an altruer sense,
With firm unswerving service of heart
And the pulse of affection intense,
With all that friendship can impart.

But a mother's love in its infinite sway
Over passion and death and brooding pain,
With power to lull and strength to allay,—
Who can find elsewhere its equal again?

The soul whose ache no self can know,
But gladly yields a meed of denial
To save some heart the pang of a throe,
To save some heart the sting of a trial.

Friends may flee and sweethearts fly,
But a mother's heart ne'er fails her child,
She still believes tho' fierce tongues lie,
And turns away that her soul may smile.

A mother's love, a mother's hope and heart,
To feel, to worship and to know,—
What greater, grander, nobler part
Has God given to earth below?

Vanity.

Vanity.

"CATCH me," to the wind cried a wisp of hay;
"Ho, I have you," said the wind, "the livelong day!"

Visiones Vitae.

Visiones Vitae.

I SAT and mused in the eventide,
And dreamed of the deeds to do.
My fancy's scope was wild and wide,
And my daily tasks were never through.

I thought and planned for some future day
When fame would give success its due.
But as I dreamed the days sped away,—
And fame passed with them, too!

So all thus idly yield to dreams,
And plan for what never nears,
Tho' a dream is no more than it ever seems,
And adds naught to the passing years.

Christ.

Thrift.

"WHAT can't be cured
Must be endured,"
The philosophers say,—
Not so; it makes the undertaking business pay.

The Optimist.

The Optimist.

"WHY do men complain of trials?"
A lawyer was heard to ask.
"Why, I rejoice in such venials,
And glory in each trying task."

The Manufacturer.

The Manufacturer.

"CUPID may be blind," he said,
"But if that be true, then—"
He added and wisely shook his head,
"He makes sights for other men."

Theodosia Burr Alston.

Theodosia Burr Alston.

The beautiful wife of Governor Alston of South Carolina and daughter of Aaron Burr was lost at sea; her fate was not known until '76.

An old seaman, dying in one of the pauper establishments of an Eastern city, confessed to having been a member of a piratical crew who destroyed the ship on which she was en route to visit her father in his exile. It fell to his lot to tell her she must die. "Her queenly figure and beautiful face have haunted me all my life, her very presence stilled our vile souls. She received the news of her death without a tremor of an eye-lash, pausing for a short prayer, and clasping her prayer book to her breast, she stepped upon the fatal plank, proud and brave to the last. She gave me one sweet, pardoning look as she went down, and that is why I tell you this,—I cannot forget."

I.

THE sun sank o'er the west while hell rose
o'er the lea,
The black-faced night swept swift across the sea;
The wild waves rose and grappled with the gale
That whistled shrill thro' the shimmering sail!

II.

Abaft, abeam, on every hand, dashed the white-
capped foam.
What prayers to God, what thoughts of home
Blanched each cheek and turned each face aghast!
Hoarse moaned the gloomy thunder of the blast.

III.

When each soul benighted had thought to know
its doom,
Hark! across the waters a lone cannon's boom!
While flashed through the storm a red hectic
flame;
And none dared to give his soul's riot name.

IV.

The shuddering ship staggered to the mist-
bleared blaze,
On through the seething breakers 'neath the dark,
weird haze.

And Hope once more waked where it erstwhile slept;
While the fog-paled flames crackled and leapt.

* * * * * *

V.

Oh, what Hell is this that flames in the night?
And what Hell-born fiends exultant in their might?
That yell like weird music to the shatter of the wreck?
And spring like demons on the gore-drenched deck?

VI.

Oh, God! 'Twas this black-flag throng that flashed the flames,
By them Thou'rt forgot, for them Hell's to blame!
Pity! They know not pity, or aught save lust for gain!
Nursed amid wreckage and the human form's pain.

VII.

But lo! a stillness drops on the waters.
Down the deck spurns one of Earth's fairest daughters;

With mien majestic she quells the demon's clangor,
And parries with a look a bold fiend's hanger.

VIII.

Not a smile, not a frown, sweeps o'er her soul-smiting face.
Before her like waves before wind the fiends give place.
Not daring to know if she be woman or wraith,
While on she steps in haughty blood's most pride-like faith.

IX.

Black as the fiends' hearts so are her vestments white,
And she seems like a Heaven-born spectre of the night.
Wordless they crouch 'neath the scorn of her eyes,
Dark in their depths as the storm-swirled skies.

X.

Cowering and trembling with horror-born fear,
While the storm sweeps on in its mad path drear.
The dying cease to moan, the living to breathe,
While the storm's heart quakes in the waters beneath.

XI.

Unflinching and unstopping she ascends the dark plank:
To the wet waves lapping and the hawser's clank;
Firmly steps on it and walks to the end,—
What spell has bound those Hell-born men?

* * * * * *

XII.

O'er the flood suspended she stands like a queen,
As lightning makes lurid the uncanny scene.
The spell is broken! and more wild are the foes
Recovered so tensely from their soul's awed throes!

XIII.

One, two, three, four, rose o'er the wild lapping deep,
And this strange woman sank to her last final sleep—
While the gale shuddered in weird, queer fury,
As it marked for the fiends their soul's augury.

Transience.

Transience.

FLAMING across the midnight skies,
A meteor shot its brilliant spray;
Tossed through this life of sighs,
Genius comes to pass away.

As darts sped from bows unseen
To cleave an unseen mark,
Are hurled through existence mean,
Lives lived in mundane dark.

Swelling chords in cadence sweet,
Stir the soul to vanish quite,
Existence draws its net complete
To free its prey in Stygian night.

One thing is certain, this life flies;
A tremor, a flutter, 't is past!
The flower once blown forever dies,
We live but to die at last.

February.

February.

I.

OH, month of promise and of witchery,
Month of budding things and of mystery!
As hope springs eternal in the human breast,
E'en from chilled and sordid beings, and the rest;
So dost thou, too, bear in thy heart
That bloom of hope, of life the renewing part.

II.

After the frosts and the wind-driven days,
'Tis sweet to know the nascent amaze
Thou dost arouse in youth, aye, and waning life,
Like the love of a woman in the heat of strife.
Abloom and aglow thou art the enchantress of vagrance,
Seductive amid thy censer's fragrance.

III.

A spirit of prophecy fills the air,
Bloom and song abound everywhere.
'Tis vague, intangible as a dream;
The soft murmurs of the purling stream,
The rousing of the new year from his winter's
sleep,
For hath he not a tryst with Spring to keep?

Opals.

Opal.

I HAVE heard this tale of the olden days,
Of the time when elves and sprites and fays,
With laughter and gleeful mirth,
On the meadow danced 'neath the moon's soft light,
And their joyous songs awoke the sleeping night;
A tale of the opal's birth.

In a spot remote from the haunts of men,
On the grassy slope of a lonely glen,
A bevy of peris danced.
And a limpid brook with its liquid sound,
As it joined the chorus of those around,
The melody much enhanced.

In a gloomy cavern not far away,
An ill-humored imp heard the music gay,

And the laughter vexed him sore:
So the fairy queen and her retinue
He imprisoned each in a drop of dew,
By means of his magic lore.

And each sparkling drop of gaoling dew
Thus became an opal of varied hue—
For such is the tale they tell.
The whimsy mood of each sprightly fay
Glimmers out the changing ray
That shines from his crystal cell.

The Tragedy.

The Tragedy.

ON a shaded rustic seat
Placed cool beneath the trees
I sit with a maiden sweet,
Not heeding time, 'tho' it flees.

Lights glance from strands of gold
That glitter on my shoulder;
Her voice quivers with love untold
As she begs me to enfold her.

Her lips are pursed for a kiss,
On her cheeks glows a vivid flush
As she seeks vainly for this bliss,
But I still her pleadings hush!

Her dear brown eyes beseech;
The soft-curled lashes scarce retain
The tears that welleth in each,
So great doth seem her pain.

I coldly from me shove her,
As frigid as an icy attic!—
For I play the angry lover
In an amateur dramatic!

The Brevity of It.

The Brevity of It.

FROM dark to dark the human, atom flits,
A moment born, then silence quits
Of life and love, the earthly store
Once cherished on the hither shore.

A breath, one glance, and stillness then,—
The weird quiet that startles men
Who think and ponder the causes o'er,
Life once spent, spent forevermore!

The turmoil, the strife we find on earth;
The little things that gather around the hearth;
Why should we know them, if so brief
Must be our pause in the most-time grief?

Why live at all? Why made in this guise,
If to lose our form and flit in yonder wise?
Oh life, best loved when least understood,
Thou art no fancy but perpetual mood!

A Winter's Phantasy.

A Winter's Phantasy.

WHAT boots the time of year
So love and life be near?
The sun scampering in wintry route—
Yet the heart is firm and true,
So life must speed with little rue.
The leaves encrimsoned desert the tree
Like gorgeous drops of blood in immensity;
The grey clouds swirl aloft like cohorts
Shattered; space-mad the Wind exhorts
In whistling shrieks the chilling soul of Day
To up and flee and vanish away—
But what matters? Love still glows,
E'en thro' all the gleaming snows,
And Life's warm throb still endures,
Still pervades the chill to which it inures.
Be earnest in the heat of thy love, O friend,—
Life is still worth living to the end!

The Mock-Bird's Song.

The Mock-Bird's Song.

A MOCK-BIRD without my window sat
upon a bough and sang,
The thrilliant notes like tuneful moods enraptured rang.
Trilling through the trellis to the chambers of my heart,
Orchestral symphonies arranged by nature's faultless art.

Swelling chords of music sweet that reach the heights of joy;
Rippling rhapsodies that somehow fail to cloy.
Dizzy flights of eery tunes that tremble in their thrill,
Like the gurgling lap of a silver tumbling rill.

Mournful notes that catch the soul and keep it pensive still,
Like the hollow echo of weird chants in mausoleums chill.

Sudden the song seeks some gayer garnished
whim to find,
And quickly lifts the throbbing pain off the
piteous mind.

Then like a lilt of lolling laughter leaps along
the breeze,
And lazily links its song with slowness like the
sigh of summer trees;
While tremulos and staccatos swell the soaring
song,
Until the fancy multiplies the lyrist to a choral
throng!

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